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STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE
US ARMY WAR COLLEGE
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania

THE FUTURE OF
US-JAPAN MILITARY RELATIONS,
1990-2000,

by

/ William V. Kennedy

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26 January 1981

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the current security relationship which exists between the United States and Japan. It identifies some prominent trends and concludes that the complexities of the US-Japan political-economic-security relationships are so complex that a great deal of study is required if the United States desires to have a stronger and more beneficial relationship with Japan by the end of the century.

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FOREWORD

This paper presents the views of the Strategic Studies Institute's Futures Group concerning the US-Japan political-economic-security relationship and prospects for a strong relationship in the future.

This paper was prepared as a contribution to the field of national security research and study. As such, it does not reflect the official view of the US Army War College, the Department of the Army, or the Department of Defense.



ANDREW C. REMSON, JR.
Colonel, CE
Director, Strategic Studies Institute

SOURCES NOTE

This projection of US-Japan military relations is drawn from a succession of efforts to gain a better understanding of the subject. Three visits, which were mainly concerned with the military relationship, were made to Japan in 1975, 1976, and 1978. The views of a succession of Japanese military attaches and of Japanese students at the US Army War College have been particularly helpful as have those of US officers on the Department of the Army and Joint Staffs, and in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, who deal with the subject.

THE FUTURE OF US-JAPAN MILITARY RELATIONS, 1990-2000

US-Japan military relations entered a new era in November 1978 with approval of a set of "guidelines" intended to support future combined studies.

Up until that date, US-Japan military relations were largely administrative in nature, stemming from the period of the Occupation and through the early years of development of the Japanese Self Defense Forces (SDF).

Domestic Japanese political opposition to rearmament made it impossible during the 1950's and 1960's and into the 1970's for the nascent Japanese SDF to consider combined planning much less combined operations with US forces other than discreet, out-of-sight air and naval exercises. Two events have brought about a change in this situation.

First was the US defeat in Vietnam. The Japanese had expected a negotiated settlement. They were stunned by what was perceived in private, although discussed in more polite terms in public, as an American moral collapse. In short, the United States lost face not only in Japan but in all of Asia.

Second was the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

In between those two events, a succession of US actions created an impression of declining US power in Asia and the Pacific. Principal among these was the announced intention to withdraw the last major US land combat forces from Korea. The rapid Soviet buildup in Asia during the same period increased this apprehension, as recorded in successive Japanese Defense "White Papers" and in extensive discussion in the Japanese press.

In the words of Yasunori Abe, Washington correspondent for Sankei, "Both Japan and Europe are sheltered by a broken umbrella."¹

1. Sankei, 5 October 1979 (Daily Summary of the Japanese Press, US Embassy, Tokyo, 13-15 October 1979, p. 7) (hereinafter referred to as "Daily Summary").

The dispatch of much of the US Seventh Fleet to the Middle East in response to the Iran and Afghanistan crises occurred shortly after with public announcement of a US "swing strategy" by which US forces in the Pacific and Asia were to be withdrawn and sent to Europe in the event of an European war with the Soviet Union.

"The swing strategy," the Tokyo Shimbun commented in an editorial on October 27, 1979, "clearly shows America's posture of making light of Asia and the attaching of importance to Europe."

"The defense of the maritime shipping lanes in the Far East," a Sankei editorial observed on February 27, 1980, "is . . . completely blank."

"Even today, . . . one year . . . since the [Defense] Guidelines were agreed upon," a Yomiuri reporter commented on 26 November 1979, "it cannot be said that full-scale work has been started in regard to Japan-US joint operations. . . . The biggest reason for this situation lies in the point that no clear-cut prediction can be made as regards the scale of the US Forces to come to the aid of Japan in times of an emergency."

At the same time, the Japanese government, press, and an increasingly concerned public are aware of widespread criticism in the United States that Japan is enjoying a "free ride" on the Japan-US Mutual Security Treaty by inadequate defense efforts. This has produced an agonizing dilemma in that there continues to be a great fear in Japan of a reversion to militarism if the defense forces are permitted to grow too large, or too rapidly. Even among many Japanese who support American demands for greater defense efforts, there is a fear that American impatience will endanger Japanese democracy.

Military government in Korea is a continuing reminder to these Japanese that the days of the Imperial Army are not as remote as Americans seem to think.

Actions by the US Government to halt the decline of US power in the Pacific have slowed the erosion of confidence in American ability to counter the Soviet buildup. Most important, at least psychologically, is the decision to halt action on withdrawal of the US 2d Infantry Division from Korea.

Although the "swing strategy" reports were followed shortly by a "swing" of some major US fleet units away from Japan, the direction in which the shift occurred dampened somewhat the sense of alarm. In short, the deployments to the Indian Ocean were seen as protecting Japan's oil "lifeline."

The perception of a growing Soviet threat from the North, however, continues to grow.

Sankei of 30 January 1980² reported a Japan Defense Agency assessment that, "If hover-craft are used it will be possible to land in Hokkaido within a little less than 20 minutes [from Soviet-occupied Kunashiri]. It means that Japan has been put into the situation where a dagger has been thrust at its throat."

A measure of the degree to which this "dagger-at-the-throat" feeling has permeated beyond the military is indicated by the extensive coverage the Japanese press is now according such subjects as command post exercises, the American base structure in Asia and attack scenarios. Because of the resources devoted and the degree of specialization achieved, one result is

2. Daily Summary, 3-5 February 1980, p. 4.

that Japanese coverage of military affairs is now considered by some to be generally superior to American coverage.

In a series of articles published at the end of January 1980, Sankei reported a Japanese assessment of the defense situation in Northern Hokkaido virtually identical to that described in a US Army War College monograph published in the same month.³

As stated to Sankei's Nobaru Onuki by a "veteran of the old Imperial Army," "Here in Wakkanai . . . we are living naked. We have neither aircraft weapons nor guns. Of the SDF men here, a little less than 200 are [Navy] men who are . . . equipped only with . . . automatic rifles. For air defense there is a company of about 200 guards, with a radar granted by the US Forces. On the sea, 20 men . . . take care of supply . . . for the [Navy] ships which come to Wakkanai."

The commander of the 9th Regiment, the nearest land combat unit to Wakkanai, estimated SDF capability to defend northern Hokkaido at two days if attacked with conventional weapons [only]." As to the possibility of US aid, he felt that "It will take a very long time to come from the US Even from the Japanese homeland it will be difficult to arrive within two weeks." Sources at Japanese Northern Army Headquarters in Sapporo told Sankei that US aid is not likely to arrive in time.

Although stated more from fatalism than from desperation, this bleak assessment has been reinforced during recent months by reports that the SS-20 and the Backfire bomber have been deployed in Eastern Siberia.

Japanese officers have suggested⁴ that a US brigade be stationed in Hokkaido both as a means to overcome the time factor and as a psychological boost to the Northern Army and the citizens of Hokkaido. On the other

3. The Defense of Japan, Special Report, Carlisle Barracks, Pa., Strategic Studies Institute, June 1, 1979.

4. Conversations with the author, 1979-80.

hand, a former commander of the Japanese 2d Division, northernmost element of the Northern Army, goes about Japan telling audiences that "you can't expect the Americans to defend Japan unless the Japanese have demonstrated that they are determined to defend every inch of Japanese soil." He advocates movement of a regiment to Wakkanai and fortification of that city.

TRENDS

An unusual welcome was accorded the aircraft carrier USS Midway and two escorts when they returned to Yokosuka from the Indian Ocean in February 1980. The mayor, a delegation from the Chamber of Commerce, and the crews of Japanese Navy ships were on hand to greet the American ships and to throw a party for their entire crew, emphatic evidence of the perception that the US Fleet units were protecting Japanese interests while in Middle East and Indian Ocean waters.

An Asahi poll the following month⁵ showed a continuing shift toward support for increased defense preparation. According to Asahi, "The early 20's generation shifted from the first time with 25% favoring reinforcement [of the SDF] to 20% for abolition." The great majority, however (55 percent), advocated "keeping things as they are."

In May 1980, Yomiuri found that 40.2 percent of respondents considered "not good" statements at the US-Japan summit talks that month advocating strengthening of Japan's defense power. Of the remainder, 29.1 percent approved the idea and 30.7 percent were undecided. Of those who gave the "not good" response, 29.3 percent objected because "it contradicts the peace Constitution." The other largest group of objectors (26.7%) felt that the question "should be decided by Japan's own independent judgement."⁶

5. Daily Summary, 12-14 April 1980, p. 4.

6. Daily Summary, 30 May 1980, p. 12.

The objection that Japan and Japan alone should decide the matter of its future defense policy is a theme that has emerged with increasing strength and frequency during the past two years. On its darker side, it includes the first incidents of personal hostility encountered by an American traveler in visits to Japan spanning a period of 34 years. To these must be added rock-throwing demonstrations led by the headman of a nearby community against a Japanese airbase in Kyushu (February 1980) when it was announced that US units would join Japanese units in training at the base. Resentment, however irrational or ungrateful in some American eyes, is sure to grow stronger if overt American pressure on the defense issue continues to increase.

Japanese government response to this combination of external danger, perceived weakening of US power, changes in domestic attitudes toward defense and a growing demand for an autonomous Japanese foreign and defense policy has been a cautious and measured increase in defense preparations while relying with more hope than confidence in the US security commitment.

Meanwhile, the restructuring of Japan's ancient military tradition continues with ultimate impact on domestic Japanese life and government, and on the US-Japan relationship largely unknown and, to date, largely unstudied by the US Government.

US action to break formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan was seen in bitter terms by some quarters in Japan: "It is necessary for us to be aware, from now," Sankei stated in an editorial on 17 December 1979, "that . . . the US also has been buried in the Machiavellian diplomacy of the European type Power politics based on tricks will become the main current of

world diplomacy in the future We grieve at this decision [to break US-Taiwan diplomatic relations]. This is because it is a grave breach of faith by the US against an Asian ally, following the announcement of the plan for withdrawing US forces from the ROK. We may receive similar treatment tomorrow." Yomiuri addressed the strategic issue more directly, quoting a Defense Agency source to the effect that "Stable navigation through the Taiwan straits is absolutely indispensable for our country's security." The then Foreign Minister (Sonoda) attempted to shunt aside the issue but was forced under pressure of questions in the Diet to assert that he meant only "that there is hardly any possibility of the arising of a conflict in Taiwan."

Mr. Sonoda's words reflect the opinion expressed by sources interviewed in October-November 1978 across the entire spectrum of political opinion except the extreme left, that the ideal arrangement regarding the future status of Taiwan is "status quo" (i.e., independence).

Control over the Senkakus islets already is a point of friction between Japan and China. Principal Japanese interviewed sources consider this issue manageable so long as the status of Taiwan does not change.

It is apparent from all sources that a change in the status of Taiwan, either by reversion to mainland Chinese control or by alliance with the USSR would profoundly affect the entire East Asian strategic equilibrium, such as it is, and very possibly damage the US-Japan security relationship.

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

The post-World War II US-Japan relationship to date gives no reason to fear the sort of collapse that occurred in the 1930's, whether from domestic Japanese politics, the nature of the SDF or the occasional frictions that arise

in the economic relationship between the two countries. However, the following current and prospective influences and events could change the US-Japan security relationship to the extent of threatening the present mutually beneficial relationship:

(1) Overcommitment of US forces coupled with a weak US economy could lead to a continuing decline in confidence in the US security commitment, to the extent of forcing Japan into a "neutralist" accommodation with the Soviet Union.

(2) A successful Soviet attack on China, resulting in Soviet control over the border provinces could isolate Japan and induce a neutralist accommodation with the USSR if it appeared that a decisive shift against the United States in the world power equation had occurred.

(3) A Sino-Soviet rapprochement, that created a "Hitler-Stalin Pact" atmosphere in which the USSR could pursue its aims in the Middle East or Europe relatively free from worry about China, also could possibly induce Japan into an accommodation with the mainland Asian powers at the expense of the US-Japan security and political-economic relationship.

(4) Extension of either Soviet or mainland Chinese control over Taiwan could drive Japan into a dependency on the major power concerned or into a frantic rearmament that could recreate the circumstances that led in the past to excessive military influence in domestic Japanese affairs.

(5) Acquisition by either Korea or Taiwan of nuclear weapons would force a reassessment of the entire Japanese security policy.

(6) Excessive US pressures for Japanese rearmament, especially if coupled with increasing economic protectionism in the United States, could embitter US-Japan relations and seriously damage the mutual security tie.

Although at a lesser level of concern than those cited above, there will be a continuing danger of the US armed forces becoming entangled in Japanese inter-service rivalries that have played a major part in modern Japanese history.

Emphasis by US military and civilian officials on improvements in air defense and anti-submarine warfare have been read in Japan as US support of the Japanese ASDF and MSDF at the expense of the Army. The visit by Secretary of Defense Harold Brown to the Japanese Northern Army in October 1979 did much to counter this impression. As noted by Sankei, "The inspection [of the GSDF 7th Division] was carried out at the strong wish of the US side. A point to be especially noted is that the GSDF maneuvers were chosen as the central object of the inspection. Up until now, the US interest in regard to . . . Japan's defense power was mainly centered on the improvement of anti-submarine and air defense capabilities."⁷

Secretary Brown's action to correct the previous perceived imbalance served not only to defuse a potentially explosive domestic and international political issue, but to support overall US and SDF objectives of increasing the Japanese defense capability. A Nihon Keizai analysis published on 29 April 1980 indicates that the Japanese Finance Ministry is using emphasis on the sea and air forces as a means of preventing an overall rise in the defense budget--exactly what GSDF sources have long predicted would be the inevitable result of US over-emphasis on air and naval requirements.

The small US Army presence in Japan is considered by the author to be a significant factor in the GSDF difficulties in gaining support within its

7. Daily Summary, 26 October 1979, p. 9.

own government. As noted by Yomiuri on 24 September 1979 only the US-Japan Navy relationship is considered satisfactory by "a Government [Defense Agency] source with steady improvement in the Air Force relationships. As concerns the Army, 'The US Army in Japan has not stationed any combat units here since 1965. As a result, the number of US Army personnel knowledgeable about Japan has . . . decreased sharply.'"

Inadequate language training for US Army members assigned to key posts in Japan and the competing administrative and training obligations of "dual-hatted" members of the last major Army unit assigned to Japan--Hq, IX Corps--have worsened the problem.

IMPLICATIONS

The complexities of the US-Japan political-economic-security relationship are little understood in the US Government as exemplified by the inadvertent involvement of US forces in Japanese inter-service rivalries.

Identification of remedies for this situation require a far more comprehensive examination than can be attempted here. The accomplishment of such an examination and the adoption of sound policies will play an important part in determining whether increasing Japanese autonomy will result in estrangement of Japan from the United States or a stronger and more beneficial relationship by the end of the present century.

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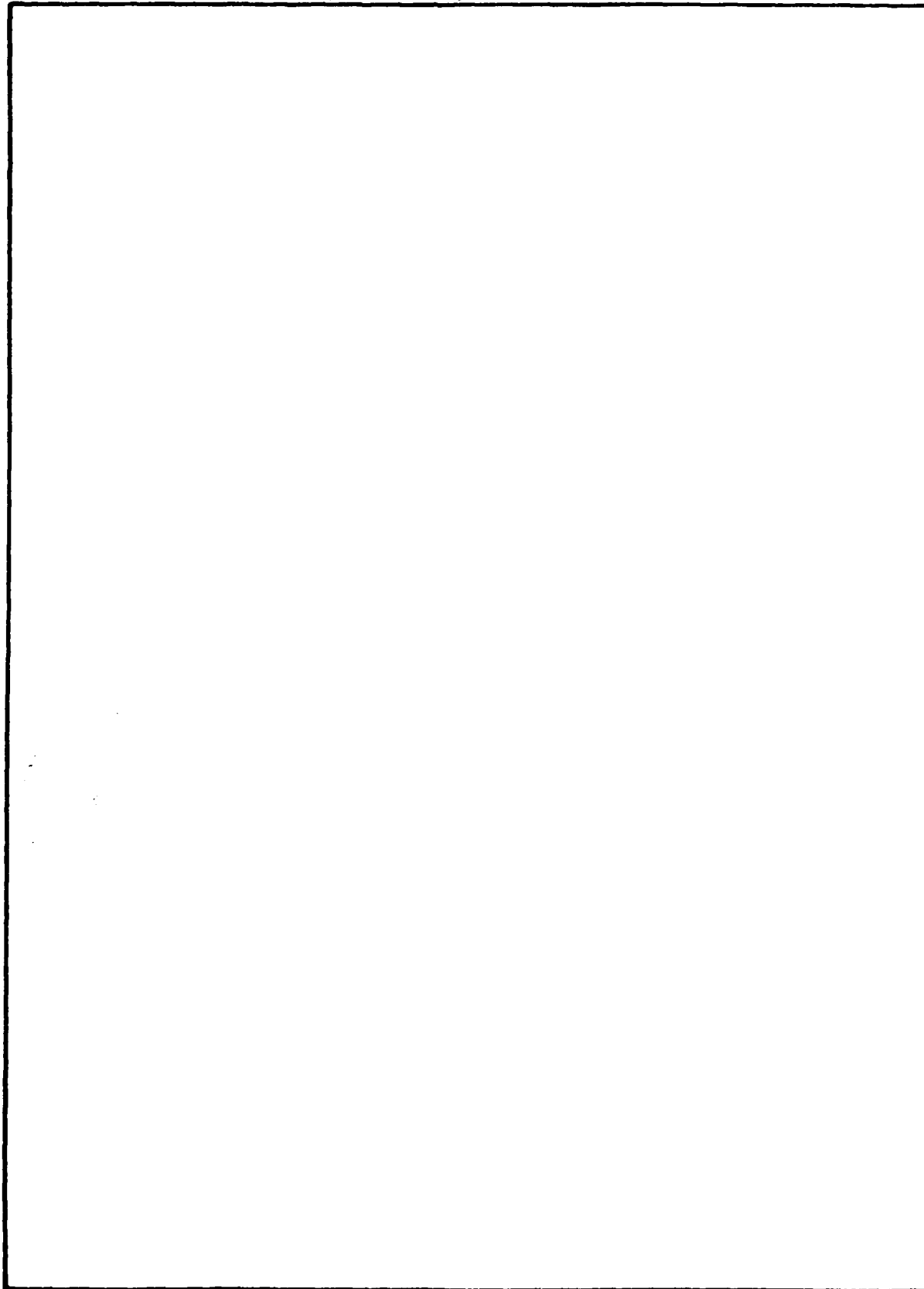
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